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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of how the Department for Education and Skills (the Ministry of Education of the United Kingdom) is managing, monitoring, and evaluating investment in school accommodation in England. School infrastructure in the United Kingdom is going through a period of significant change as the government seeks dramatic improvements in educational standards. This has meant a five fold increase in capital investment in school buildings from 0.7 billion pounds a year in 1996-1997 to more than 3.5 billion pounds in 2003-004. It has required improving local processes for making investment decisions, which has required surveys of all schools, developing clear priorities, and improving appraisal expertise at local government and school levels. It has also required providing schools with their own capital budgets. It has been necessary to develop a better understanding of the impact on educational standards of capital investment in school infrastructure and to reassess the expectations for quality and purpose of accommodation that schools provide. It has been necessary to look for improvements to procurement and management of investment, particularly in making greater use of private sector capital to fund initial investment and private sector expertise in designing and managing buildings. (SLD)

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MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PUBLIC POLICIES FOR EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

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Summary of presentation

School infrastructure in the UK is going through a period of significant change as the government seeks dramatic improvements in educational standards. This has meant:

- a five times increase in capital investment in school buildings from £0.7 billion a year in 1996-97 to over £3.5 billion in 2003-04;
- improving local processes for making investment decisions. This has included requiring surveys to be performed of all schools to ascertain needs; developing clear prioritisation of needs in consultation with schools and others locally; improving options appraisal expertise at local government and school level; providing schools with their own capital budgets;
- developing a better understanding of the impact on educational standards of capital investment in school infrastructure. This has been through statistical analysis as well as more qualitative investigations and pilots. Results will guide the total amounts invested as well as how available resources are used;
- reassessing the expectations for the quality and purpose of accommodation that schools provide. Increased sharing of facilities with the local community, the impact of Information Technology, changes to the curriculum, improved environmental standards are all having an impact;
- looking for improvements to procurement and management of investment, particularly making greater use of private sector capital to fund initial investment and private sector expertise in designing and managing buildings to reduce lifetime costs and improve the quality of service provided by buildings.

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MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PUBLIC POLICIES FOR EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

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1. Introduction

1.1 This paper provides an overview of how of the Department for Education and Skills (the UK's "Ministry of Education") is managing, monitoring and evaluating investment in school accommodation in England. This is undergoing considerable change as the UK government focuses on achieving a transformation in the quality and outcomes of the education system. The whole motivation behind the approach to school infrastructure is now to support and contribute to the raising of educational standards. This paper looks at:

- the role of central government relative to local government and schools;
- key background facts on school accommodation in England;
- local Asset Management Plans;
- evidence of educational gains from capital investment;
- developing "schools for the future";
- the role of private finance in supporting investment in school accommodation.

2. The role of central government relative to local government and schools

2.1 The relative roles of central and local government and schools are key to understanding the approach taken to managing investment in school accommodation. Whilst central government is key to defining investment in school accommodation, the 150 locally elected government bodies in England own and are responsible for managing the majority of state school accommodation. They have considerable autonomy in making detailed capital investment and other decisions within their locality. There is an increasing expectation that local government should have more autonomy over *how* central government priorities are achieved within a set framework, with central government intervention only if *outputs* are not achieved. A similar approach is being taken with schools, which have been given considerable autonomy over budgets once they are allocated to them. Every school now has its own capital budget.

2.2 As a result, whilst it is legally possible for central government to direct exactly how capital is invested in schools (and this is still done for some funding) this is not regarded as desirable. As a result, much work is directed to improving local decision-making by local government and by schools, to reduce the need for central government to make detailed choices as to how funding is invested. This has particularly been the case given recent large increases in central government support for capital investment in schools. In making changes to the management, monitoring and evaluation of schools accommodation, central government has to work in consultation with, and gain the support of, local government and schools. It does not operate within a "command and control" culture or legal structure.

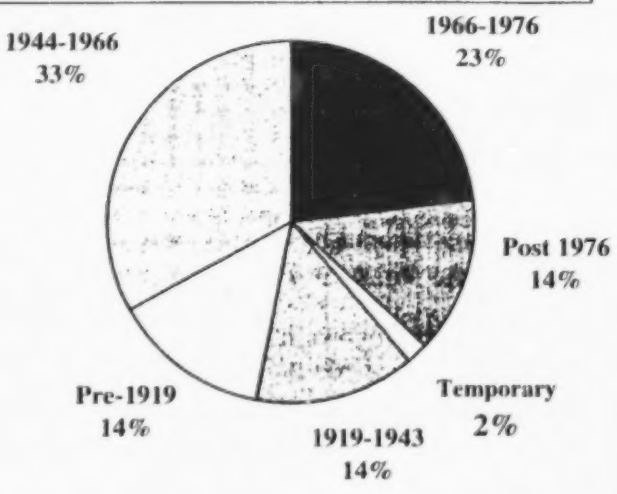
2.3 Decisions about funding for schools in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are not taken by the central Department for Education and Skills – they are managed independently by relatively powerful regional governments in those areas. This paper deals only with England, which accounts for about 80% of the population in the United Kingdom.

3. Key background facts on school accommodation in England

3.1 There are about 24,000 state schools in England, accommodating around 7.7 million[1] pupils aged five to 18 years. 3,500 of these are secondary schools, each with between 600 to 2,000 pupils – with 1,000 pupils being about the average. Most of the rest are primary schools (taking children from 5 to 11 years old) with pupil numbers typically around 250, but sometimes as low as 20 or 30 in rural areas. There are also other schools for pupils with special needs, such as physical, emotional or learning difficulties.

3.2 The accommodation itself varies widely in terms of age, condition and suitability for teaching the curriculum. About 14% of current accommodation was built in the last 25 years, but about 30% is more than 50 years old. Combined with relatively low levels of investment in recent decades, the age of many school buildings indicates a likely significant need for investment. The age split is illustrated below:

Figure 1: Age of school buildings in England



3.3 Based on a recent surveys of schools, (which will be updated periodically) it is estimated that over the next five years some £7 billion will need to be spent on a capital work to improve or maintain the physical condition of schools. This is before taking into account the need for new schools to reflect population growth, or improvements to address issues of suitability for teaching.

3.4 The high level of need for condition works probably results from under-investment in the past. Central government support for investment in schools ran at about £0.7 billion[2] a year for many years. In the last four years, investment has increased to £2.2 billion in 2001, to £2.8 billion this year and £3.5 billion[3] in 2003. This is against an estimated like-for-like replacement cost of buildings of about £78 billion.[4]

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[1] About 93% of pupils attend state schools, the balance attending private fee-paying schools. Compulsory school age is 5 to 16 years.

[2] £0.7 billion ≈ MXP8.4 billion/US$1billion/€1.1 billion

[3] £3.5 billion ≈ MXP42 billion/US$5.0 billion/ €5.6 billion

[4] £78 billion is at 2003 prices ≈ MXP936 billion/US$110 billion/ €125 billion

4. Local Asset Management Plans

4.1 When the current UK government, led by Prime Minister Tony Blair, took office in 1997, addressing the immediate repair needs of schools was a high priority. Additional funding was found to help to do this, and it was used to fund specific projects that local authorities bid for. Over the four years of that specific programme, around 17,000 individual projects were funded by central government.

4.2 Given the need for extensive investment in schools, it was clear that central decisions about specific projects were not viable except in the short term – it is bureaucratic and reduces local autonomy. However, it was also clear that the quality of local decision-making about investment in school buildings was often poor. Many local governments, for instance, had no survey information about the needs of their schools on which to base decisions as to how to prioritise investment. Equally, there was a lack of local consultation with schools and others about how priorities should be decided and where funding should be invested. The government was also keen to involve schools much more in major investment decisions, and to give schools autonomy over managing their own finances and decisions where possible.

4.3 As a result, local Asset Management Plans were developed in consultation with local government and schools. Asset Management Plans seek compliance, by local government, with a number of centrally set requirements – for instance to conduct surveys of all schools to assess their repair needs and their suitability for teaching the curriculum. They also set expectations on areas such as to the level of local consultation and the standard of options appraisal. Compliance with requirements is audited.

4.4 The aim of local Asset Management Plans has been to ensure that local decision-making is robust so that central government can be confident that allocating increasingly large amounts of capital funding by formula is going to be used where it is most effective in raising educational standards. Much of the data that local governments gather for their own purposes is also collected centrally to inform allocations of funding to local government. So, whilst a large element of funding is now allocated on the basis of pupil numbers alone, a significant part does relate to need as measured by surveys of school buildings.

4.5 Local governments' Asset Management Plans are audited before funding is provide. If an Asset Management Plan is not considered satisfactory then the local government concerned has to provide the Department for Education and Skills with details of exactly how it intends to invest in buildings before funding is released. The objective is to improve local government knowledge and processes so that unhypothecated funding can be allocated without further central government involvement in taking detailed investment decisions. This "inverse proportion" rule is key to much of central government's dealings with local governments on a range of issues.

4.6 Asset Management Plans also mean that, for the first time ever, central and local government has a national and broadly reliable picture of the needs of school accommodation. This gives a very useful starting point in discussions with "the Treasury" (the UK Finance Ministry) to obtain funding. It also enables benchmarking and performance comparisons between local governments, helping them to judge their performance and needs relative to others.

5. Evidence of educational gain

5.1 Another key strand of work by the central government in the UK over the last three years has been to evaluate the role of school accommodation in supporting higher educational standards. This is seen as key in ensuring that funding is put to the best use locally as well as supporting central government decisions on whether to invest in schools or, for instance, hospitals or railways.

5.2 Initial research was published in January 2001 by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) which was commissioned to do the work. PwC looked at the issue from three standpoints:

- analysis of existing published research;
- qualitative evaluation through discussion with teachers and others;
- quantitative evaluation of the impact of capital investment in schools through analysis of investment at several hundred schools compared to later changes in standards of attainment at those schools.

5.3 Existing published research across the world showed some positive evidence for impact on standards, but also produced examples were the result was less clear. Much research was also limited in terms of its reliability. The qualitative evidence was strong, with good examples of how improved buildings support increase standards. It suggested that accommodation could be particularly motivating for pupils and teachers beyond simply providing facilities needed to teach the curriculum. The quantitative research showed generally positive links between investment and improved standards, however it did not distinguish between the impact of different kinds of capital investment – for instance distinguishing between replacing a roof that was leaking, and improving the layout and lighting of a classroom.

5.4 PwC was, therefore, commissioned to look further at a smaller sample of schools with better data. This will be published soon but the initial findings are promising, showing strong linkages between investment in improving the suitability of accommodation and higher standards. This is enabling direct linkages to be shown between investment and exam performance by pupils at all levels. This then translates into future economic benefit for the community as a whole through expected higher earnings in future years.

5.5 A major limitation in this work has been the availability of the data – it has been trying to identify details of capital investment during 1990 to 1995, to link to improved pupil attainment from 1996 onwards. Pupil attainment records are good – these have been systematically collected at school level for many years, but investment records are poor, not least because they have never been held centrally. Work is now being pursued to see how, without being bureaucratic, better information collection for future evaluation can be developed.

6. Developing schools for the future

6.1 Whilst the UK government has been keen to address immediate issues where schools have been in poor repair, it is also concerned that investment is made for the long term, with old schools which are uneconomic to operate and poorly suited to current expectations being replaced where possible, rather than simply "patched up".

6.2 One strand to support this has been to prepare guidance summarising current good ideas for school design. This reflects changing expectations as to:

- the role of schools. They are increasingly seen as community resources for adult learning, leisure and access to the Internet, as well as providing contact points for other services such as health and social counselling and nurseries and after school childcare. This is particularly the case for more deprived areas. This has significant implications for size, security and spaces (such as toilets) needed for adult use;

- inclusiveness of schools for pupils with special needs, such as physical disability. Increasingly, such pupils are being educated alongside other pupils in mainstream schools, and so need schools with specialist support areas, greater space (perhaps for wheelchairs), access to all areas perhaps through lifts, improved lighting, acoustics and signage;

- the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). As well as issues of specialist ICT suites, and providing an ICT infrastructure in all classrooms, ICT is impacting on how pupils learn and communicate – for instance supporting more personal study or video conferencing with other schools or teachers;

- the flexibility needed in the future. If we can be certain of one thing, needs will change over the life of a building, so designs need to have flexibility built into them;

- environmental impact of schools, resulting in reduced energy consumption, through good insulation, good use of natural light, heat and ventilation;

- minimising lifetime costs. Too often in the past, investment has been aimed at lowest initial cost, ignoring the lifetime costs of repair and refurbishment. Minimising costs over 30 or more years is now recognised as a key objective;

- working space needed for the school workforce. Increasingly, it is expected that teachers should have work areas outside of the classroom, with computers, to support better preparation and pupil monitoring. Also, that they should be supported by teaching support and administrative staff who also need work areas.

6.3 An objective is to constantly renew the good ideas available through updating this publication and examples on the Department's website.

6.4 The Department for Education and Skills is also investing in a number of pilot projects to develop innovative designs and uses for school accommodation. It has also piloted new processes for deciding how improvements are made, increasing the involvement of teachers, pupils and the local community in making decisions about design and investment.

7.1 The role of private finance in supporting investment in school accommodation

7.1 A key strand of increasing the investment in school buildings, and ensuring that investment is protected against future neglect, has been the development of the Private Finance Initiative for schools in the UK. This means that local governments or schools sign contracts lasting for 25 to 35 years with private companies for the supply of accommodation for a fixed annual fee. The private company finances the construction and has to meet performance measures or else suffers financial penalties – so that many of the risks of

building and operating a school to high standards are moved to the private sector. From the first contract signed 4 years ago, 37 contracts providing for over £1 billion of private capital for nearly 500 schools have been signed so far. This level of private investment will shortly be occurring every year, and may soon represent about a third of central government investment in school accommodation.

7.2 This new means of procurement is judged a success: it is cheaper than traditional procurement, and ensures high quality accommodation over many years. It is still too complicated to procure, but the process is increasingly being simplified to speed up procurement and enable smaller projects to be undertaken economically. Currently, most projects provide investment in the range of £20 to £100 million each (a single new 1,000 pupil secondary school costs about £12 million, a 220 place primary, about £2 million), but the aim is to enable smaller projects also to be undertaken.

Web references:

1. Department for Education and Skills main website: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/

2. Direct links to other areas within that site are:

    - Main Capital Investment in Schools web page: http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/ResourcesFinanceandBuilding
    - Design Guidance (including "Schools for the Future" guidance): http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/schoolbuildings
    - Private Finance: http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/schoolsprivatefinanceinitiative

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